

Watertown Housing Partnership
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, August 19, 2014
3rd Floor Planning Office

Attendees

Fred Reynolds, Chair
Cliff Cook, Member
Paul Fahey, Member
Anita Shismanian, Member
Brian Costello, Member, Director, Watertown
Housing Authority

Steve Magoon, Director, DCDP
Andrea Adams, DCDP Senior Planner
Gideon Schreiber, DCDP Senior Planner
John Hawes, Chair, Planning Board
Calandra Clarke, Resident

I. Approval of Meeting Minutes

Minutes from July 15, 2014: Mr. Fahey moved to approve the draft Minutes as presented. Mr. Costello seconded, and the Minutes were unanimously approved.

II. Discussion of Draft Housing Section of Watertown's Comprehensive Plan

Mr. Hawes gave an update of the discussion of the Housing section of the Comprehensive Plan by the Council Subcommittee on Economic Development & Planning and the Planning Board. The intent was to make the Housing section broader.

Mr. Cook agreed with Mr. Hawes, but questioned if the intent was to provide a broader mix of housing types, how would Watertown promote family housing?

Mr. Magoon suggested having family housing included in the Comprehensive Plan would provide the Town with the ability to require developers to provide more detached family housing, or rentals or condos with 3+ bedrooms.

Mr. Hawes agreed with Mr. Magoon. He noted the experience with 202-204 Arsenal Street, which included 6 3-bedroom units because the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals to cite a need for units with more bedrooms as a way to include families. Mr. Hawes noted another stumbling block to family housing are Watertown's parking requirements.

Mr. Reynolds agreed, noting that elderly residents and disabled people also find parking included with a unit to be a necessity. He questioned how to address this problem Town-wide in older housing stock, and the parking problems in Watertown, more broadly. This includes the winter-time on-street parking bans.

Mr. Magoon noted that for new development, or redevelopment, there typically is adequate parking provided. The difficulty is with parking in older units, where parking on the site was never intended, in favor of on street parking.

Mr. Cook suggested the Comprehensive Plan acknowledge these difficulties, and allow less parking than is required by the Ordinance, if the development or redevelopment is within a certain minimum distance to transit, such as a 1/4-mile.

Mr. Reynolds noted the difficulty with tandem or stacked parking, where cars are parked headlights to back muffler, making it less desirable for tenants to live in the spaces.

Mr. Magoon and Mr. Schreiber both noted that tandem or stacked parking would not be allowed in new developments for just this reason.

Mr. Cook suggested that if a developer got a break on the parking requirements that some other benefit should accrue to the Town, such as more open space, or a higher percentage of affordable units, or a preference for senior housing, etc.

Mr. Costello noted the question and requirements for parking directly affects the Housing Authority. He noted the potential to construct more units at the Lexington Gardens property, but this idea was in part stymied by the parking requirements.

Mr. Reynolds suggested that Watertown reconsider allowing accessory apartment, which are currently prohibited. He suggested they be allowed, but only in cases of family members of as affordable units.

Mr. Hawes expressed skepticism that the units could be limited in these ways.

Mr. Schreiber suggested an accessory apartment idea would work in the T-zone and only allow the units to be a certain maximum size base on a percentage of the habitable space.

Mr. Reynolds also said another issue was allowing developers to build larger and taller buildings. This would incentivize the creation of more affordable units.

Mr. Hawes agreed, noting the Townhouses that had been built as part of *Alta at the Estate*.

Mr. Schreiber noted that certain types of affordable units don't count towards the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) on a particular site, as an incentive to affordable development.

Mr. Reynolds asked about next steps for the Housing section.

Mr. Magoon said the DCDP staff would make additional corrections as recommended by the Housing Partnership, then send the Comprehensive Plan chapter on to the Town Council Subcommittee on Economic Development & Planning. He said the Partnership members would be informed of when the draft Housing Section would be brought before the Town Council Subcommittee.

III. 2016-2020 Consolidated Plan

Ms. Adams noted that the WestMetro Consortium, of which Watertown is a member, is beginning the process to update the Consortium's 5-year plan. She said she was working to answer a set of specific questions on housing needs and a market analysis. Ms. Adams noted that Watertown must conduct at least one public meeting on its section of the Consolidated Plan, and hoped to utilize the September Partnership meeting for this purpose.

IV. Monitoring by FinePoint in October, 2014

Ms. Adams noted that FinePoint, the company that does affordable housing compliance monitoring for the WestMetro Consortium is scheduled to conduct monitoring of 1066 Belmont Street and St. Joseph Hall in October, 2014.

V. Update on the Inclusionary Zoning Text Amendment

Ms. Adams noted that the Planning Board was scheduled to conduct a public hearing on the proposed inclusionary zoning text amendment at its next meeting on September 8, 2014. She encouraged members of the Partnership to attend.

VI. Funding Request from CNAHS

Ms. Adams noted the Partnership had received a request, through a letter addressed to Mr. Schreiber, from the Cambridge Neighborhood Apartment Housing Services (CNAHS) for renewed funding.

Mr. Reynolds said the last time the Partnership dealt with CNAHS was in 2013, and the decision then was to continue funding, but at a reduced rate, in acknowledgement of the relatively small client load from Watertown, and that the foreclosure crisis spawned by the 2005-2007 general economic decline had begun to ease. He suggested that DCDP staff seek more information on how many Watertown clients CNAHS was servicing over 2013-2014. He also suggested there was another organization in Newton that provided the same services.

Adjourn

Mr. Reynolds asked for any additional business. Hearing none, he asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. Fahey moved to adjourn the meeting, and Mr. Cook seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved. Meeting adjourned at 7:30 PM.